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ABSTRACT

Overcoming the challenges of educational discontinuity that arise from the migratory lifestyle is the central focus of the Migrant Education Program. This chapter describes Project SMART (Summer Migrants Access Resources through Technology), a national distance learning program for migrant students that addresses such challenges by coordinating efforts among its partner states. In the late 1980s, the state migrant programs in Texas and Montana began collaborating on a summer program for migrant students. Their efforts led to the formation of a National Distance Learning Committee, which formalized guidelines for curriculum content, educational strategies, teaching methods, and student activities. Other partnerships addressed telecommunications, staff development, interstate record keeping and records transfer, and distribution of materials to participating school districts. The first satellite-delivered instructional broadcast occurred in 1992, and by summer 1993, the program was serving about 18,000 migrant students. In 2002, more than 49,000 students participated. Program elements include delivery of the same curriculum by the same television teachers to migrant students who remain in Texas during the summer and to those who travel to other states; activities that are relevant to students' experiences; five grade levels of programming aligned with Texas standardized tests; delivery via live interactive television, delayed television, or videotapes; and use of local mentors. Other migrant technology projects are briefly described. (SV)

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CHAPTER 13

Project SMART: Using Technology to Provide Educational Continuity for Migrant Children

BY PATRICIA MEYERTHOLEN, SYLVIA CASTRO, AND CINTHIA SALINAS

Public Law 89-750, which authorized Title I, Part C, Education of Migratory Children, was passed by Congress on November 23, 1966, as an amendment to Public Law 89-10. This law was initiated in recognition that the basic Title I program did not meet the unique academic and support service needs of migratory children brought about by their mobility. Historically, migrant children:

- had a high incidence of mobility
- were viewed by school districts as nonresident and, as such, not the district's responsibility
- received short spans of instruction
- had no continuity of instruction from district to district and from state to state
- suffered academically because resources did not follow the students as they moved[1]

[1]Alexander Goniprow, Gary Hargett, and Nicholas Fitzgerald, *The Same High Standards for Migrant Students: Holding Title I Schools Accountable, Volume III: Coordinating the Education of Migrant Students: Lessons Learned from the Field* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Under Secretary, 2002) (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 467 999).

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Under the newly developed Migrant Education Program (MEP), states were charged with the responsibility of designing and supporting programs that helped migrant students overcome the challenges of mobility, barriers of culture and language, social isolation, and other difficulties associated with a migratory lifestyle in order to succeed in school and to successfully transition to postsecondary education or employment. Positively impacting the educational achievement of migrant children has posed unique challenges to educators since the program's inception. Under the reauthorization of the Title 1, Part C law, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, states must ensure that migrant children

- receive appropriate instructional and support services that address their special needs in a coordinated and efficient manner
- are not penalized in any manner by disparities among the states in curriculum, graduation requirements, and state academic content and student academic achievement standards
- receive full and appropriate opportunities to meet state content and student performance standards all children are expected to meet
- benefit from state and local systemic reform[2]

Vicente Serrano identified the lack of instructional continuity as one of the chief detriments to academic success among the children of migrant workers in the United States.[3] Movement across district lines results in changing curricula and materials, instructional approaches, and learning contexts. For elementary students it often disrupts important relationships between student and teacher and could have dire consequences for children in bilingual or special education programs.

Alexander Goniprow and colleagues described the most common conditions leading to the discontinuity of education for migrant children: lost instructional time due to early withdrawal while families

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[2]*No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. U.S. Code.* Vol. 20, sec. 1301 (2002). http://www.ed.gov/legislation/ESEA02/pg8.html/ (accessed January 8, 2003).

[3]Vicente Z. Serrano, *Mobility and Continuity: New Ways of Lowering Dropout Rates for Migrant Students through Credit Accrual and Exchange* (Denver: Education Commission of the States, 1983) (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 261 851).

relocated or due to late re-entry; lack of information to place students properly; loss of course credits due to lack of information about courses taken elsewhere or inappropriate placements; missed opportunities to prepare for and take the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test; inconsistent high school course offerings; conflicts between need to work and to attend school; dissimilar language assistance programs for LEP migrant students; dissimilar grade placement policies; and different graduation requirements between schools and states.[4]

The MEP as a state-administered, federally funded program has a wide degree of flexibility in designing programs that address educational discontinuity. To fill in the gaps in a migrant student's education, states may offer programs at grade levels ranging from prekindergarten to high school, in time slots ranging from weekend tutorial sessions to summer night programs, and in settings ranging from traditional classrooms to migrant labor camps. Many times MEP staff implement nontraditional educational approaches with the hope that students will make significant academic gains in short periods of time.

This search for effective ways to maintain more educational continuity and improve migrant students' learning experiences has led migrant educators to investigate computer and distance learning technologies. Project SMART (Summer Migrants Access Resources through Technology), a national distance learning program for migrant students, offers tremendous potential in addressing this educational dilemma by coordinating efforts among its partner states. Students can move from school to school and still receive the same curriculum delivered by the same instructor.[5]

Carolyn Adger voiced the need for fundamental change in the ways schools function to promote student success.[6] Her premise was that by modifying curriculum and instruction and involving all stake-

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[4]Goniprow, Hargett, and Fitzgerald, *The Same High Standards.*

[5]Texas Education Agency, *Project Smart Operational Guide* (Austin, TX: Texas Education Agency, 2002).

[6]Carolyn Temple Adger, *Language Minority Students in School Reform: The Role of Collaboration* (ERIC Digest) (Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, 1996) (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 400 681).

holders, the notion of *school* can be reconceptualized to formulate a more collaborative structure. Project SMART promotes a new conceptualization of migrant education by making the entire nation a school for participating migrant students.

How Project SMART Began

In the late 1980s to early 1990s, visionary migrant education leaders began to explore new possibilities for technology projects. Various state-level migrant directors met to discuss the concept of shared accountability for Texas-based migrant students moving to other states. Frank Contreras, director of the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) Division of Migrant Education, and Angela Branz-Spall, director of the Montana Office of Public Instruction's Title I Migrant Program, agreed to a summer program for Texas migrant secondary students traveling to Montana. They formed a collaborative interstate relationship with the following premises: (1) a desire and commitment to improve migrant education through the resourceful use of technology; (2) a willingness to share expertise, staff, and funding to implement the program; (3) the boldness to be innovative and flexible in program design; (4) the strong belief that migrant students deserve opportunities for academic success; and (5) a proactive leadership approach in moving the project toward implementation.

Contreras and Branz-Spall enlisted the aid of several migrant educators, which evolved into the National Migrant Distance Learning Committee. These individuals were long-standing friends who held influential positions and roles within migrant education programs.[7]

[7]Roy Jackson, Hilda Escobar, Marty Pena, Sheila Nicholls, and Art Sepulveda from several Texas Education Service Centers; Tadeo Reyna and Sylvia Castro of the Central Stream Program Development/Coordination Center; Ana Acevedo of the Houston Independent School District; Ramon Billescas of the Pharr San Juan Alamo Independent School District; Norma Davis of the Mission Consolidated Independent School District; Mari Gonzalez of the La Joya Independent School District; Elena Mycue of the McAllen Independent School District; Peggy Wimberley of the University of Texas at Austin Migrant Student Graduation Enhancement Program; and Tomas Yánez, director of the Texas Migrant Interstate Program. Other participants included Kathy Bibus, Susan Durón, Bob Lynch, and Pat Meyertholen of the Indiana Migrant Education Program; Brenda Pessin of the Illinois State Board of Education; Manuel Recio of the Pennsylvania Migrant Education Program; and Paula Stoup.

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The technology project in the summer of 1992 was the first migrant distance-learning effort using satellite-delivered instruction. The pilot, "From the Lone Star to the Big Sky," included approximately 150 migrant students and their parents. The organizers selected content, hired teachers, and delivered lessons by satellite from the Texas Region XX Education Service Center (Region XX ESC) in San Antonio. The summer pilot was a success, and preparations were made to continue, improve, and expand the project through follow-up meetings.[8] Periodic meetings were scheduled to coincide with major migrant conferences and in San Antonio so distance-learning teachers from the Region XX ESC could report to the committee.

The National Distance Learning (NDL) Committee formalized general guidelines for content selection: challenging curriculum following TEA requirements; learner-centered and research-based instruction; culturally and linguistically relevant content; integration of math, science, and language arts; thematic units; hands-on activities; support materials and extension activities; English-as-a-second language (ESL) strategies; and reinforcement activities for the home. The Region XX ESC Distance Learning Division (TI-IN Network) entered into partnerships and formal arrangements to provide the telecasts. This included hiring and training television teachers, developing curriculum, and delivering instruction via satellite. The Central Stream Program Development/Coordination Center (PDC) supported the effort with staff development, coordination, and funding for several components of the project. The Texas Migrant Interstate Program (TMIP) contributed interstate efforts such as student tracking, credit exchange, and out-of-state testing.

The collaboration, staff development, and training were diverse and complex. Cross-training was important and necessary. For example, the Region XX ESC TI-IN Network distance-learning teachers and personnel were trained to "catch the vision" of educational opportunities for migrant students, while school personnel were required to learn about satellite technology and distance-learning terminology.

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[8]Frank Contreras, *Texas/Montana Summer Distance Learning Pilot Project: "From the Lone Star to the Big Sky"* (1992) (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 361 126).

Finally, the Region XX ESC TI-IN Network distance-learning instructors prepared student curriculum, or SMART packets, which TMIP distributed to participating school districts. An effort was made to minimize costs to districts. The TEA's Division of Migrant Education covered the expenses for television instructors, satellite airtime, materials development, and production. School districts paid for materials duplication, personnel, and project operating costs, through summer amendments funded by TEA. Funding requests and program selection were prioritized based upon the length of the summer program, number of students to be served, cost per student, and uniqueness of the program in meeting the special needs of migrant students.

In just one short year, by the summer of 1993, the program had grown to 18,000 students. The TEA reported that more than 3,200 high school students had earned a half credit toward graduation by taking Mathematics of Money during the televised course. The numbers increased yearly as programming for more grade levels became available and as more Texas schools and more receiving states (states receiving students home-based in Texas) joined the Project SMART consortium. The growth of the project continued even though Project SMART was not mandatory in Texas; it was just one more resource for districts that wanted to expand their summer programs. Some districts continued their traditional migrant summer programs; others incorporated Project SMART; and still others made Project SMART the centerpiece of their summer programs. By 2002, Project SMART served almost 50,000 migrant students in 11 states.[9]

How Project SMART Works

Every year, the TEA's Division of Migrant Education contracts with the StarNet Consortium-Region XX ESC in San Antonio, Texas, to provide the SMART telecasts, the television teachers, the curriculum, and the satellite broadcast time. Costs for television instructors, satellite airtime, materials development, and production expenses are provided by the TEA's Division of Migrant Education while participat-

[9]States participating in Project SMART include Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New York, Ohio, Texas, and Wisconsin.

ing Texas school districts and receiving state partners pay for materials duplication, personnel, and project operating costs.

The NDL Committee, composed of partner state representatives, develops themes, evaluates the preceding year's SMART offerings, fosters interest among receiving states, and explores new technologies that might be incorporated through the SMART program. In accordance with best practices for English language learners, the NDL Committee provides continuous, explicit attention to how students' language skills, cultural backgrounds, and experiences shape the way Project SMART defines its unique distance-learning model for migrant students.[10]

The NDL Committee actively addresses the vastly differing needs of the many states. The flexibility of the instructional delivery models for Project SMART allows Texas districts and partner states to incorporate SMART to meet their own needs and resources. For example, in Texas, Weslaco Independent School District (ISD) customizes Project SMART to fit its own goals and objectives by infusing gifted-and-talented strategies into SMART thematic units at the elementary levels. McAllen ISD (Texas) employs college students to mentor migrant students during the SMART summer migrant education project. LaJoya ISD (Texas) incorporates an e-mail component into the SMART design to communicate with migrant students in other receiving states taking SMART courses. Through the Indiana MEP, Project SMART is offered in a trailer at a migrant labor camp. In Montana, a "techmobile" travels to all the summer migrant education projects, providing technical support for Project SMART's hands-on activities. The Minnesota Migrant Resource Center developed SMART traveling thematic unit kits for use in its summer migrant education projects.

Blending television technology and innovative instructional design, Project SMART provides distance-learning education to two groups of students. First, migrant students who remain in Texas during the summer are taught in their homes, at school sites, or in community centers via televised classes with additional instructional support from locally employed teachers. Second, Texas students living temporarily out of state and attending established summer

[10]Adger, *Language Minority Students in School Reform.*

educational programs for migrant students can also participate. Students migrating out of state receive the same curriculum from the same television teachers as students remaining in Texas, providing educational continuity for Texas home-based migrant students. Migrant personnel in the states that receive Texas migrant students coordinate with Texas migrant personnel and television instructors to facilitate credit accrual for secondary migrant students.[11]

At each level of instruction, Project SMART is based on the philosophy that learner-oriented activities should be relevant to the students' experiences, and that lessons should be framed in meaningful contexts. Extensive drill and practice are given low priorities, and conceptual teaching for understanding is the guiding factor for instructional development. The themes, lessons, and activities selected for the five grade-level strands reflect functional principles, including an abundance of opportunities for natural, meaningful communication. Cooperative learning and interactive group activities that can be used either at home or school are incorporated into the lessons. Materials and resources easily available to students are used as centers of suggested follow-up activities.[12]

Project SMART offers five grade levels of programming. An early childhood level (PK-K) emphasizes oral language within developmental contexts (social, cognitive, cultural, and physical) and higher order thinking skills. The lower elementary level (grades 1-2) and the upper elementary level (grades 3-5) are directly related to the reading, writing, and math skills on Texas's standardized test, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), with special emphasis on integrating higher order thinking skills into math and science thematic units. The middle school level (grades 6-8) provides math and science skills related to TAKS with lessons built around migrant students' daily experiences. Traditionally, the high school level (grades 9-12) offers one new credit course per summer. School districts have the opportunity to continue to use videotapes of the secondary courses for credit and/or enrichment.[13]

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[11]Texas Education Agency, *Project Smart Operational Guide*, 2002.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Ibid.

Many times Project SMART is infused into existing summer offerings. The summer program at the local site may consist of three to five days of instruction per week, and it may be a half-day or full-day program. In receiving states, summer migrant projects range in length from three to eight weeks, depending on the crop cycle. Students often begin Project SMART in Texas and continue with the programming in another state. Project SMART live broadcasts run from the second week in June through the end of July. Summer migrant education programs tune in to Project SMART as soon as their summer programs begin. Areas in Texas that do not have access to telecasts by cable receive the instruction via satellite, as is the case for the receiving states participating in Project SMART. For those summer migrant projects without satellite or cable capabilities, videotapes of the telecasts are available.

An integral component of instruction involves SMART Partners, employed by summer migrant programs. For students remaining in Texas, the SMART Partner often is a teacher or paraprofessional who interacts with students in their homes. In out-of-state programs, SMART Partners facilitate in summer school programs, which are mostly center based. SMART Partners monitor progress, assess student achievement, implement additional instruction, and share ideas with the television teacher via a toll-free telephone number. SMART Partners are critical team members who provide the face-to-face interactions necessary to build self-esteem, as well as the follow-up activities to the televised instruction.[14]

Television teachers call on participating schools in an organized manner and use the interactions to monitor performance and to maintain instructional momentum. To minimize delays and down time, SMART Partners review proper telephone etiquette with their students before using the toll-free telephone number during on-air class time. Students participating in classes from their homes or community centers or via videotape are not able to call in during classes. These students, along with those participating in the live interactive sessions, may talk to the television teacher before or after the on-air class during established office hours.[15]

[14]Ibid
[15]Ibid.

Other Technology Projects and Programs

Project SMART has piloted other technologies as part of its offerings, such as streaming audio and video, reception via computer stations that receive SMART through T-Star (the TEA's satellite programming), and Internet tutoring options. Through the NDL Committee, Project SMART works collaboratively with other technology projects that serve migrant students.

The Office of Migrant Education (OME) piloted five five-year technology projects for migrant students in 1997. Project Estrella, one of the OME technology grants awarded to the Illinois Migrant Council (IMC), serves fifty high school students each year who travel with laptop computers and access online coursework. IMC coordinates with the NDL Committee and offers SMART secondary coursework as one of the credit options to its secondary students.[16] In the summer of 2003, the SMART secondary offering was a creative writing course developed for CD-ROM by the National PASS (Portable Assisted Study Sequence) Center. In addition, a balanced literacy approach will be incorporated into the SMART thematic instructional model in the lower and upper elementary grades. Balanced literacy offers students and teachers a more sustained approach to reading in order to proactively address the challenging NCLB reading standards that migrant children, as well as the general student population, are expected to meet. Staff development to provide teachers and SMART Partners training on balanced literacy will be offered via satellite television, which will provide continuing education credits to those who successfully complete the staff development training program.

As technologies improve, becoming less expensive and more readily available to the large numbers of migrant students who participate in SMART in a wide variety of ways, the NDL Committee pilots them as optional means of service delivery. However, there are still great obstacles impeding migrant student access to the various technologies being applied to migrant education. For example, in many receiving states the only telephone in migrant labor camps is the public pay phone. Computer labs in school buildings are usually

[16]Jeri Kinser, Patricia Meyertholen, and Brenda Pessin, "From the Fields to the Laptop," *Learning and Leading with Technology* 28, no. 5 (February 2001).

closed during the summer months when summer migrant programs are operating in the receiving states. Summer migrant education projects often operate out of libraries, migrant labor camps, community centers, and migrant families' residences—all sites where there is limited access to technology. When incorporating various forms of technology into the SMART programming, the migrant lifestyle is always kept in mind.

Project SMART is successful because it embraces the lifestyle of the migrant student and seeks to make it a positive experience, rather than a negative one. And Project SMART continues to flourish because it offers a curriculum that is adaptable, universal, flexible, and transportable—all qualities that address the need for continuity in the educational process of migrant students. Finally, Project SMART offers migrant educators a distance-learning technology that is affordable, available, and flexible enough to allow for a variety of implementation needs to meet the demands of migrant education programs throughout the nation.

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